

3

We Never Get Off at Embankment to Go to McDonald's

and around and around and around and a

L is up to *Odyssey* 17. This is so bad for him. Hundreds of people saying wonderful marvellous far too young what a genius. It seems to me that it does not take miraculous intelligence to master the simple fact that 'Οδυσσεύς is Odysseus, if you go on to master 5,000 similar simple facts you have only shown that you are a miracle of obstinacy.

Anyway I have been watching Seven Samurai once a week with L to counteract the deplorable influence of the Circle Line. But today something terrible happened.

A woman sitting across from me saw the *Reader of Handwritten Japanese* sitting unopened in my lap and said Are you studying Japanese & I said Sort of.

Nine green bottles hanging on the wall

I said I was mainly learning the language so I could understand Kurosawa's Seven Samurai and also (if it ever came out on video) Mizoguchi's Five Women Around Utamaro which I had watched five days in a row when it showed at the Phoenix, and that I was also interested in a text called Tsurezuregusa by a 14th-century Buddhist priest.

NINE GREEN BOTTLES HANGING ON THE WALL

She said Oh and she said she had seen Seven Samurai though not the other one and what a marvellous film

I said Yes

and she said It's a little on the long side but what a marvellous film, of course it's basically so simple isn't it I suppose that's the source of its appeal, sort of like the Three Musketeers, an elite band—

and I said WHAT?

and she said Sorry?

ELITE BAND! I said staring aghast

and she said there was no need to shout.

And if ONE GREEN BOTTLE should accidentally fall
There'll be EIGHT GREEN BOTTLES hanging on the wall

I began to imagine L seeing all kinds of things in the film which would not be incompatible with throwing a person from a plane on orders from a third party

EIGHT GREEN BOTTLES HANGING ON THE WALL

I said politely but firmly I think if you see the film again you will find that the samurai are not, in fact, an elite band. Lesser directors have of course succumbed to the glamour of the eliteness of a band, with predictable results; not Kurosawa.

She said there was no need to take that tone

EIGHT GREEN BOTTLES HANGING ON THE WALL

& I said politely Essentially the film is about the importance of ra-

tional thought. We should draw our conclusions from the evidence available rather than from hearsay and try not to be influenced by our preconceptions. We should strive to see what we can see for ourselves rather than what we would like to see.

She said What?

And if one green bottle should accidentally fall

I said Also, we should remember that appearances can be deceptive. We may not *have* all the relevant evidence. Just because somebody is smiling doesn't mean he wouldn't be better off dead.

She said I really don't think

SEVEN GREEN BOTTLES, HANGING ON THE WALL

I said Let's say A sees his wife, B, burned alive at time *t*. A survives. Later we see A singing in a local ritual. C, observing the ritual, thinks A has come out ahead. We infer that C is not in full possession of the facts & has been influenced by his own preconceptions since

She said It all seems rather clinical

I said Clinical!

THERE'LL BE SIX GREEN BOTTLES, HANGING ON THE WALL

She said & isn't this rather morbid—

I pointed out that if she were thrown into a tank of man-eating sharks she would not think it morbid to consider the possibility of exit from the tank.

After all we both when it comes down to it we both think it's a marvellous film, she said pleasantly.

I was afraid she might give some other example but luckily the train pulled into Moorgate and this was her stop.

SIX GREEN BOTTLES, HANGING ON THE WALL
SIX GREEN BOTTLES

[Could be worse. He could be singing 100 bottles of beer on the wall, instead of a song that not only counts down, but starts at 10.]